



**“Our vision is a future where all of Rural Maryland is prosperous with thriving resources, vibrant economies, and healthy, connected communities”**

## 2020 Rural Maryland Council Legislative Review

The Maryland General Assembly adjourned Sine Die early due to the coronavirus pandemic on March 18, 2020 after final passage of the Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget, the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future and several bills related to revenue enhancements. The Rural Maryland Council and the grant programs, the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and the Maryland Agricultural Education and the Rural Development Assistance Fund, are fully funded and are designated to receive \$6,327,575 in Fiscal Year 2021. We thank Governor Larry Hogan and our new presiding officers, Senate President Bill Ferguson and House Speaker Adrienne Jones for their support.

RMC’s Legislative Committee met bi-weekly to review legislative efforts, advance its legislative priorities and work with legislators. Other activities included testifying before standing committees, working with the Rural Caucus and local rural delegations, as well as drafting and submitting written position statements.

This year, Governor Hogan proclaimed February 4, 2020 as Rural Maryland Day. As part of Rural Maryland Day, the RMC welcomed more than 100 rural advocates to meet with dozens of elected officials and staff. The RMC was officially recognized during floor sessions in the State House and, in partnership with the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts and the Maryland Dairy Industry Association, hosted a luncheon with over 250 attendees.



*Rural Maryland Day, RMC Executive Director Charlotte Davis, RMC Chair John Hartline and Ryan Snow with Governor Hogan’s Office.*

### **RMC Budget Priorities Achieved Under Senate Bill 190 and Senate Bill 191**

- ⇒ RMC will receive \$6,160,575 million in funding for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund.
- ⇒ The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) will receive \$167,000.
- ⇒ The five Regional Councils were funded at \$200,000 each.
- ⇒ The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) will receive its core funding at \$2,873,000.
- ⇒ The Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program will receive \$2.5 million in Fiscal Year 2021.
- ⇒ The Office of Rural Broadband will receive \$9,160,000 through the Local Government Infrastructure Fund in the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.



*RMC’s Legislative Lunch, RMC Chair John Hartline, Senator John D. (Jack) Bailey, President Bill Ferguson, RMC Executive Director Charlotte Davis, Santo Grande with Delmarva Community Services, and Scott Warner, Former RMC Chair.*

The Rural Caucus met on February 27, 2020 chaired by Delegate Brian Crosby from Southern Maryland to discuss issues that focus on our rural areas. Comptroller Peter Franchot spoke to the group as well as the Maryland Rural Health Association and the Maryland Farm Bureau.

### Operation and Capital Budget Highlights:

Before the abrupt adjournment, the State's Fiscal Year 2021 Operating and Capital budgets were passed with bipartisan support. The Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Bill, Senate Bill 190, constrains growth at 0.4%, achieves Spending Affordability Committee goals and leaves a fund balance of \$231.3 million and a structural surplus of \$67 million. Almost \$1.4 billion in cash resources are preserved including \$1.2 billion in the Rainy Day Fund. State support for public schools will exceed \$7.2 billion and direct aid to local school systems will increase an estimated \$236.3 million, or 3.8%. The budget plan dedicates \$362 million to support the implementation of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future and \$10 million in funds for the Coronavirus Response.

### Rural Legislative Highlights:

- Tax Relief with the passage of an exemption on sales and use taxes on aircraft parts and equipment (HB16/SB121 Sponsors: Senator Addie Eckardt, Delegate Chris Adams) and an exemption for data centers on sales and use taxes and personal property taxes (HB1339/SB397 Sponsors: Delegate Jay Jacobs, Senator Steve Hershey)
- Expansion of telehealth with the creation of a mental health coverage pilot program (SB502 Sponsors: Senator Steve Hershey and Bill Ferguson)
- Expansion of the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program (HB998/SB501 Sponsors: Senator Steve Hershey, Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes)
- Expansion of broadband services (HB999/SB540 Sponsors: Senator Steve Hershey, Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes)
- Expansion of water resources for municipal governments (HB1035/SB495 Sponsors: Delegate Chris Adams, Senator Addie Eckardt)
- Passed but Vetoed: Inclusion of Agriculture Education as a priority in career and technical education. (HB1300/SB1000 Sponsors: Speaker Jones, President Ferguson)
- Passed but Vetoed: Development of agricultural markets with the creation of a Local Farm Enterprise Program (HB1488/SB985 Sponsors: Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, Senator Katie Fry Hester)



*Delegate Brian Crosby, Delegate Wendell Beitzel, Mark Widmeyer with Governor Hogan's Officer and Comptroller Peter Franchot at the February 27th Rural Caucus Meeting (organized by Delegate Crosby office and RMC)*

**2020**  
**LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES**

- 3** Events Hosted: Welcome Breakfast, Legislative Lunch, and Rural Maryland Day
- 6** Biweekly conference calls with Legislative Committee
- 28** Written position statements submitted
- 181** Bills monitored

The Collective Voice for Rural Maryland

***RMC is grateful for the hard work of its Legislative Committee and rural advocates who made the 2020 session a success.***

**To Learn More About RMC**

**Visit Our Website: [rural.maryland.gov](http://rural.maryland.gov)**

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